



Our Zero Waste Future:

Options and opportunities for local & regional councils

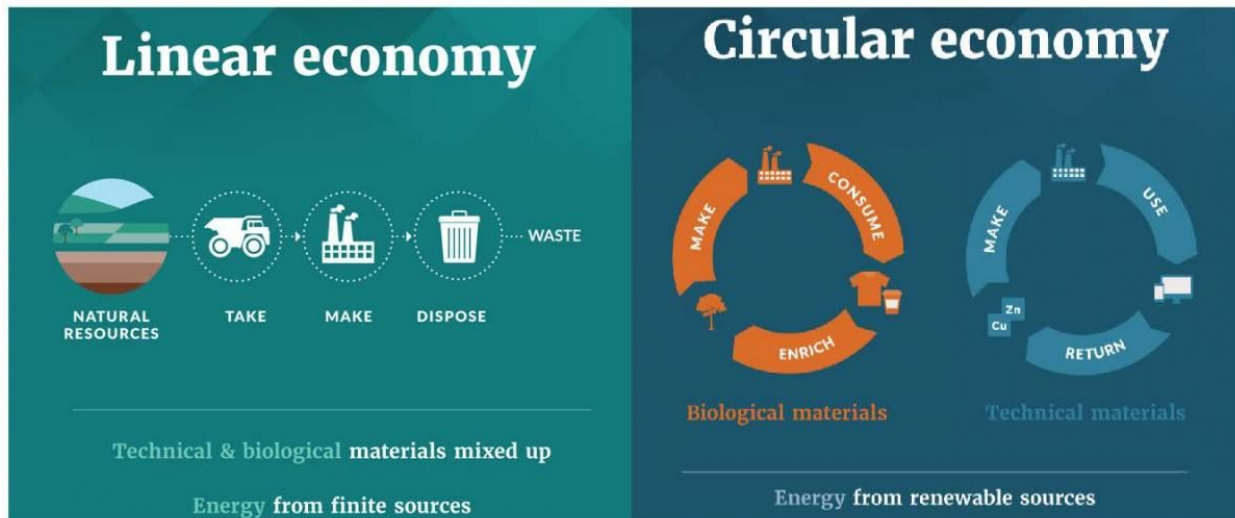
The idea of “managing” waste isn’t working. Increased efficiencies in waste disposal systems and huge vested interests have worked to diminish the feedback and have hidden the crisis. For too long we have put our faith in the idea of “managing” waste but it hasn’t solved the problem, and a tragedy is unfolding as the hidden costs of waste accumulate.

We are in danger of reaching crisis point. A crisis demands action - a breakthrough! The breakthrough strategy for solving our waste crisis is very simple - a **Zero Waste Circular Economy**. This is a “whole system” approach to **redesigning** resource flows comprised of an underpinning philosophy, a clear vision, and a call to action - all based on the notion that we CAN eliminate waste.

The Opportunities

Circular Economy

Central government and leading businesses from around the world are embracing the circular economy. This is a transformative way of thinking about resources. It is a sustainable, viable and low carbon alternative to the dominant ‘take-make-waste’ linear model where the lifecycle of materials is maximised. At the end of life all materials are reutilised. A circular economy is restorative by design. It is underpinned by the use of renewable energy.



Global Warming/Climate Change

Landfills are a major source of greenhouse gas emissions, so are waste incinerators. The linear mode of production and consumption also generates huge energy and resource inefficiencies. Large-scale waste elimination will help us meet our Paris Climate obligations by reducing CO₂ and methane emissions. No other avenue for reducing these emissions provides such a range of other positive outcomes. In a 2015 [report from Europe](#),* Eunomia found that actions at the top of the waste hierarchy offer the biggest potential greenhouse gas abatement.



Local Economic Development & Employment

Communities will be able to take control of a huge untapped, and increasingly valuable resource - to create wealth from waste. An economic sleeping giant will be awakened through reuse of the vast quantities of separated materials that will come on stream - creating a huge opportunities for new reuse and recycling industries, as well as use within existing business. The recovered-materials industry in New Zealand is already a significant part of the economy, but there is still so much untapped potential. The EU social enterprise reuse, repair and recycling group [RREUSE](#)** recently found that reuse activities create 296 times more jobs than an incinerator, and 8 times more jobs than recycling centres.

Reduced Liability

Our long-term waste disposal costs will be greatly reduced - and we will take the burden of cleaning up leachate contaminated waterways and polluted beaches from future generations

Tourism

A Zero Waste policy will help protect, enhance and build on our "100% Pure" brand, so that we can truly promote ourselves as THE clean, green tourist destination.

Exports

It will be a powerful signal to our overseas markets that New Zealand primary produce comes from an unpolluted environment, without hidden health hazards associated with dioxin and groundwater contamination. The environment is a central component of our GDP and is inextricably linked to our exports. Our markets are dependent on a “clean green” premium that is at best frail. Even the perception of food contamination is a serious threat.

Imports

By recycling the maximum amount of materials we will significantly cut down on primary imports and make sure that those we do import are used to the full.

Local & National Reputation

Local communities and New Zealand can enjoy and take advantage of a reputation for pioneering an innovative environmental/social policy that becomes established as a global precedent. A Zero Waste Circular Economy is the economy of the future.

Who Should Do What

Regional Councils

Regional Councils will have a major planning role to fulfil including setting zero waste targets. Vision will be required to encompass what the future may hold and need. New reprocessing plants and new bulking facilities must be located. Secondary material flows will need to be carefully anticipated and monitored. There will be many players from all sectors involved and the regional councils will need skills of coordination and diplomacy as well as those of planning, monitoring and removing bottlenecks to progress in their region. It is important that regional councils resist investment in infrastructure that will ‘lock-in’ the ‘take-make-dispose’ linear economy, such as waste-to-energy technology for mixed municipal solid waste.

Local Authorities

Local Authorities will guard community ownership of the waste stream, implement bylaws and devise further measures which favour material and resource recovery over disposal. When assessing tenders for waste, recycling and transfer station contracts, social and environmental outcomes should be weighted alongside cost. Achieving collection of clean, single material streams must be prioritised to maximise reuse and recycling outcomes.

Local authorities will enter into partnerships with each other and the community and private sectors, tailoring contracts and structures that provide incentives for waste reduction and diversion from disposal. These partnerships will devise local resource recovery facilities and depots, which will be built or commissioned by local authorities. Community and householder participation will be encouraged as will education and promotion of Zero Waste through schools. Good practice and intelligence in all things pertaining to Zero Waste, from contract design and recovery facility layout through to bin stickers and schools programmes, will be networked and exchanged between authorities with the guidance and support of the Zero Waste Network.

Local Government Role in Advocating for Central Government Change

Successfully transitioning to a circular economy requires a sea change in waste policy, particularly the use of the Waste Minimisation Act to bring about mandatory product stewardship schemes, to phase-out of products and packaging that is not easily processed onshore, to increase and expand the Waste Disposal Levy, and to mandate comprehensive waste and recycling data collection. Local and regional councils have a role in continuing to call on Central Government to implement these policies, and articulate how these changes would improve waste and recycling outcomes in local areas. Articulating policy demands can be achieved with the guidance and support of the Zero Waste Network and the New Zealand Product Stewardship Council.

References:

**The Potential Contribution of Waste Management to a Low Carbon Economy*. Eunomia. October 2015.
Available: <https://tinyurl.com/yxu36hwt>

***Re-use has higher employment potential than recycling*. RRUSE Europe. September 2015.
<http://www.rreuse.org/wp-content/uploads/Final-briefing-on-reuse-jobs-website-2.pdf>